

December 1, 2017

Parent or Guardian of a Student at  
William Rainey Harper High School  
6520 S Wood St Chicago, IL 60636

Re: Proposed Closure of William Rainey Harper High School

Dear Parent or Guardian:

Chicago Public Schools (CPS) is committed to providing every child from every community with a high quality education that prepares them for success in college and in life. CPS students continue to make record-breaking academic progress in every part of the city. Our vision is that all CPS schools can build on this progress by offering high quality, rigorous instruction from talented educators that help put Chicago students on a path to lasting success.

Enrollment at Harper in the fall of 2006 was at 1,301 students while enrollment in fall of 2017 was 133 students. Under-enrolled schools like Harper face challenges in providing a well-rounded education for their students because they often have difficulty offering robust program options for students. Ultimately, the cycle of declining enrollment creates challenges in programming and staff recruitment that make it difficult to provide the high school experience that students deserve.

As a result of these trends, the Englewood Community Action Council (CAC) recommended that CPS create a state-of-the-art neighborhood high school in Englewood and consolidate existing neighborhood high schools in Englewood. In turn, in June 2017, CPS followed through on the recommendation by formally proposing an investment to create a state-of-the-art neighborhood high school, now worth \$85 million. The school is scheduled to open in fall 2019 with a freshman class.

Following the Englewood CAC's recommendation, CPS formed a Community Leadership Steering Committee to work through the details of this proposal, including planning for the new high school and developing a plan for the current Englewood high schools and students. Over multiple meetings between the Steering Committee and CPS leadership as well as tours of the existing Englewood high schools, a variety of options were considered for the current Englewood high schools, including closure and multi-year phase outs. Ultimately, a vote was taken on two options and the majority vote was to close the high schools, including Harper, at the end of 2017-18 school year and provide robust, individualized support to transition current students to other higher performing high schools that are a good match for their needs. That is why I am proposing the closure of William Rainey Harper High School (Harper), located at 6520 S Wood St.

The rationale for this action includes the following:

- If the high schools were to phase out over several years, the problems associated with declining enrollment would continue and the risk of diminished programs and staffing challenges would increase, potentially worsening educational opportunities for students.
- If the high schools were to phase out and certain students wanted to transfer before school closure, they would not be eligible to play sports the year they transfer as per the guidelines of the Illinois High School Association (IHSA), which governs participation in sports in the state.



- More than 90 percent of students who currently live in Englewood now choose to attend non-neighborhood high schools.
- With the right individualized transition supports, students from Harper could have a better high school experience, be better prepared to graduate high school and be ready for college and career success.

The proposed closure of Harper meets the criteria of the Chief Executive Officer's Guidelines for School Actions (Guidelines) because it is a proposal requested by community members via the process to request proposals outlined in the Guidelines. Specifically, we have heard the request for this proposal from the Englewood Community Action Council and at a meeting of the Englewood Community Leadership Steering Committee in calendar year 2017.

**Current students at Harper will be provided options to enroll in higher performing schools, as defined by the Guidelines. CPS will work closely with the Harper students and their families to develop individualized transition plans that determine the school that will best meet their academic and social-emotional needs.** More details can be found in the attached transition plan, and we will be holding meetings with the community to further discuss these plans.

In addition, as a part of this proposed closure, I will also propose that Harper's attendance area be reassigned so that every student continues to have a neighborhood school, if desired. The proposed attendance areas changes are as follows: the northern portion (north of 67th Street) of the geographic boundary currently assigned to Harper HS will be assigned to Gage Park HS and the southern portion (south of 67th Street) will be assigned to Bogan HS.

If you would like more detail about the proposed closure, please refer to the Draft Transition Plan that is included with this letter.

As a next step, CPS will hold two community meetings and one public hearing to hear further feedback on CPS' proposal (meeting information is below). Following the meetings and hearing, the Board of Education may vote on this proposal as early as February of 2018.

### **Public Comment on this Proposal**

I invite you to share your feedback on the proposed closure of Harper during the following two community meetings and one public hearing outlined below:

#### **Community Meeting 1**

January 10, 2018  
6 to 8 p.m.  
Kennedy King College  
(Great Hall, U Building)  
740 W 63 St

#### **Community Meeting 2**

January 17, 2018  
6 to 8 p.m.  
Hamilton Park Fieldhouse  
513 W 72nd St

#### **Public Hearing**

January 30, 2018  
5:30 to 8 p.m.  
CPS Central Office  
42 West Madison Street

If you wish to comment at the community meetings or hearing, please adhere to the following procedures. You must sign up to speak on the day of, at the designated location, beginning one hour before the designated start time and ending 30 minutes after the start of the meeting or hearing. You will have two minutes to speak, unless the hearing officer or meeting organizer provides an

extension. The hearing will conclude at the stated end time or following the comments of the last person who has signed up to speak, whichever occurs first.

Thank you in advance for your feedback as we work to provide all Chicago Public School students with the high quality education they deserve. After the community meetings and public hearing, I will review a written report from the hearing officer and at that time, I may recommend that the Board consider and approve the closure of Harper.

**Further questions and concerns**

All of this information can also be found at [CPS.edu/Transitions](http://CPS.edu/Transitions). If you have any questions or concerns regarding this proposal and the draft transition plan, please email [transitions@cps.edu](mailto:transitions@cps.edu) or call Chicago Public Schools at (773) 553-1500.

Sincerely,



Forrest Claypool  
Chief Executive Officer  
Chicago Public Schools